

HEAVEN'S NURSE CHILDREN

NO. 1021

A SERMON
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms."
Hosea 11:3.*

IF you note well the opening part of this chapter, you will find that it consists of a wonderful chain of mercies; every single line is a rare jewel, and the whole passage is a case unspeakably precious. The chapter begins with *love*; ancient, sovereign, electing love. "When Israel was a child, then I *loved* him." When the Israelite nation was in a very low and poor estate, and was brought into slavery and subjection in Egypt, God had set His love upon it, and called it His own inheritance. Not for their numbers or greatness as a nation were they chosen, but when they were little and despised they were yet beloved of God. Distinguishing grace had written the name of Israel upon Jehovah's heart. Spiritually we who have believed are in the same favored condition, and our hearts rejoice this day at the memory of "His great love, wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses and sins." This is the riverhead, from which all the streams of His mercy flow—"I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore with loving-kindness have I drawn you." Like the golden-sanded river which had its rise in Eden, electing love branches off into many streams, and waters all the garden of the Lord. This is the root from which the tree of blessing springs. "He has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: according as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:3, 4). Let others say what they will, electing love will always be most precious to us; for it is the foundation blessing, the first of all favors, the mother of mercies. We nail to our mast the old flag of free grace, and believe with the apostle (Eph 1:11) that we were, "Predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things after the counsel of His own will."

The next sweet word in the chapter is *sonship*—"When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called My *son* out of Egypt." We are, according to the inspired apostle, "Predestinated unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will" (Eph 1:5). Adoption follows hard upon the heels of election, and is another messenger of good tidings; innumerable blessings come to us by this door. "Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father; therefore you are no more a servant, but a son." "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God." "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like He is, for we shall see Him as He is." Sonship with God is an unspeakable dignity, and yet it is reserved for such poor dust and ashes as we are; what shall we say concerning this? Are we not swallowed up with adoring gratitude? Unto which of the angels has He said at any time, "You are My son"; but this has been said to us, and we are thus favored above all creatures that the Lord God has made! Boundless blessings are included in sonship; it is no light thing to be a child of the Lord of hosts, the Prince of the kings of the earth; "If a son, then an heir of God through Christ." This opens up before us far-reaching views of present covenant provision, and of future infinite bliss; to be, indeed, born into the family of God is a dignity to which the descent of an imperial prince bears no more comparison than a spark in the tinder to the sun in the heavens!

And, because we have in this chapter love and sonship, we see immediately after, in the same verse, *calling, salvation, and deliverance*—"I called My son out of Egypt." The Lord does not leave His chosen people forever in the bondage of sin; when the day of their jubilee dawns, they go forth without price or reward, with a high hand and an outstretched arm. They cannot remain forever under guilt, nor abide heirs of wrath, even as others—out of Egypt they must come when the years are accomplished! They are His, and He will call them by His effectual grace, and separate them to Himself; their calling is

something more than the common and universal gospel invitation—it is a persuasive, convincing, conquering call; only they whom the Lord has set apart for Himself know it—“Whom He did predestinate, them He also called.” This call is like Joseph’s invitation to his venerable father to come and see him; it was accompanied by the wagons in which the old man could ride. It was not only an entreating call, but an *enabling* call. “All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me,” says the Savior; and He speaks to purpose, because He helps them to come. No, He *brings* them Himself—*carrying* them, like lost sheep, “Upon His shoulders, rejoicing.” There is no violence done to the will, but it is set free, and then, being acted upon by a graciously enlightened understanding, it yields to the call, and follows Jesus! “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.” Israel would never have come out of Pharaoh’s country if the Lord had not fetched them; but none can say that He drove them out—no, rather, “As for His people, He led them forth like sheep.” Every step of their exodus from bondage under the divine call was the result of divine leading and influence. Even thus, spiritually, a peculiar but delightful stress is put upon the chosen of God, and therefore they come out of the Egypt of sin. The grace to eat the paschal lamb, to strike the blood upon the lintel, and to gird up the loins, and leave the land of leeks, and garlic, and onions, is given only to the heirs of the promised possession.

Then we come upon the blessing of *holy rearing and education*, which we have in our text—“I taught Ephraim also to go, taking them by their arms,” as they do who have to teach little children to walk, supporting their tottering footsteps, and instructing them how to put one foot before the other, until they are able, at last, to run alone. Calvin says it means, “I have led him on foot; as a child who cannot yet walk with a firm foot is, by degrees, accustomed to do so, and the nurse, or the father, or the mother, who leads him, has a regard for his infancy; so, also, have I led Israel, as much as his feet could bear.” And, as if this mercy and condescension of God, in thus comparing Himself to a woman with her babe, were not sufficient; in addition to this, He becomes a physician, too, and grants *healing*! He says, “I healed them.” They had not only weakness that needed to be supported, and ignorance that needed to be tutored, but they had, in addition, sickness and infirmity that needed medicine. “I healed them.” He who had carried them as Shaddai—The Lord all-sufficient, became to them Jehovah Rophi—The Lord Who Heals Them! Who shall tell how much we all owe to heavenly pharmacy? Our diseases are deep-seated and most dangerous; how happy are we in having an omnipotent Physician, whose word, alone, is more than a match for all our maladies! Surely we have a sickness for every day in the year, but the beloved Physician has a remedy for every complaint. Glory be unto Him who forgives all our iniquities, and heals all our diseases! Then, as if all this were not enough, we find Him drawing them on in the paths of obedience and holiness—not with ropes and chains that would compel against their will, overhauling them roughly, but with forces suited for minds and hearts. “I drew them with cords of a man, with bands of love.” Thus does the gracious Spirit of God work in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure! “The love of Christ compels us.” “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” “The Spirit also helps our infirmities.”

Thus we have in a few lines opened up before us a cabinet of covenant gems rivaling those which adorned the high priest of old. Here is a holy education for the nursling that was afraid to walk! Here is exercise of the strength which the Physician had restored.

As if this had not completed it, there come *unburdening* and *rest-giving*—“I was to them as they that take off the yoke on their jaws.” They had been like oxen, with a heavy yoke upon them, and God had come and taken the yoke away; and there they stood, as we see horses stand when they are made to rest, when the bearing-rein is loosened, and they stand at ease. And this God has as surely done for us, as for His ancient people; He has fulfilled that word to us, “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, and you shall find rest unto your souls.” We enjoy the peace of God which passes all understanding; it keeps our hearts and minds by Christ Jesus. Nor is this all, for the gracious Redeemer takes care to fill His people’s mouths with good things; and therefore He does not forget the *feeding*, for it is added, “I laid *meat* unto them.” The Lord refreshed His weary people with “food convenient for them.” As the oxen, after the yoke was removed, were fed, so God, when He had removed our yoke of guilty bondage, fed us with the finest of the wheat as He made us understand the gospel of His Son. The doctrines and promises of His word are substantial meat for hungry souls: “My soul shall be satisfied with marrow and fatness, and

my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips.” Certain under-shepherds are afraid of laying too much doctrinal food before the Lord’s people, but it is a great mistake; the truth of God never feeds to excess, though it always satisfies. The good Shepherd does not stint His sheep, but He gives them so much that they lie down amid the exceeding plenty of the green pastures; they cannot eat it all, and they lie down in the midst of a superabundance which infinite mercy has provided. See, then, how God’s boundless love piles mountain upon mountain; as the old classics used to say, Pelion upon Ossa, that we, up from the depths of our distress, may climb to the heights of His blessedness and enjoy the fullness of the glory which God has treasured up for us in the person of Christ Jesus our Lord! One is tempted, with such a preface to our text, to linger in it, and to be like the man who made the porch of his house larger than the house itself! You can but be fed, and it matters not whether the barley loaves and fishes are in my basket, or whether I carry them loosely in my hand, as long as you are refreshed by them you will not quarrel with my disorderly serving. However, I restrain my loitering heart, and proceed to the text.

Here is the figure of a nurse and a child. “I taught Ephraim to go, taking them by their arms.” Let us look at this in reference to the children of Israel. Then let us view it in reference to ourselves.

Take *Israel’s case* first. They were in Egypt, and God was about to bring them forth and make them a nation, and give them a country of their own. He began to deal with them as little children; He selected as His ambassador, and as the mediator between him and them, not a man of imperious disposition, not an Elijah with fire at his beck, or a John the Baptist with an axe in his hand, but, “the man Moses, who was very meek, above all men that were upon the face of the earth.” They were childish, vain, and foolish; and their leader must be very gentle and full of pity. It requires a patient disposition to deal with such grownup children, for what you could bear from children, who are children in years, you cannot so well endure from those who, though they have reached the age of maturity, have not reached the age of discretion and seem as if they never would. You can teach a child of six; but who shall be tutor to a child of sixty? The great God, the Father of Israel, selected as a tutor for these grownup children the meekest man that lived, and in so doing, He dealt tenderly with them, as a mother with her child. Then, though He meant them ultimately and finally to come out of Egypt, He did not uproot them from their adopted land all at once, roughly and without previous loosening. No unexpected command was given them that they were at once to sever all the ties that connected them with the people of Egypt; they were not forced in an unlooked-for moment to leave the leeks, and garlic, and onions, and to go forth into the desert, but a long series of miracles was exhibited before their eyes—not only that Pharaoh’s power might be broken, but that they might be encouraged to venture themselves upon the providence of God, and trust themselves with Him.

They ought to have been strong enough to have marched out of Egypt at once, at the first word of their leader; had they forgotten the old covenant which had been made with their fathers? That the Lord would give them a land that flowed with milk and honey? But they were little children and could not perform manly exploits; they needed to be taught courage, and manliness, and faith in the unseen God of their father Abraham. All those plagues which God worked in the fields of Zoan, while they had a dark side to Egypt, had a bright side to Israel; it was a “teaching them to go”; a gently persuading them to trust in God, and go forth at His call. Yet, after having seen all Jehovah’s wonders, when at last they did take the first step, and found themselves at Succoth, and by-and-by came to Pihahiroth by the sea, they trembled like babes who totter and are ready to fall! Was it not tender mercy on the part of God that He put forth His hand and *held them up*, and drowned all their fears at once? They had been alarmed when they heard the whip of their taskmasters and the rattling of the war chariots behind them, but God made, as it were, with one sweep, an end of everything that need give them distress. I do not find that whatever were their foolish fears, the children of Israel in the wilderness were ever again afraid of the Egyptians pursuing them, and attempting to drive them back as slaves; the old fear was slain at once! They had been slaves and dreaded their masters, but the strength of Egypt had been so terribly broken at the Red Sea, that Israel, who before tottered, even began to dance to the music of the triumphant timbrel! Infinite tenderness removed the stumbling block out of their way, lest their infant faith should be tripped up.

When they were fairly in the wilderness, they were still treated as children, and they needed it. They had many sensible manifestations of the presence of God with them; a truly spiritual faith does not ex-

pect any manifestation to the senses. God treats us today as men compared with the way in which He nursed the Israelites; we have no pillar of glory shining over a visible tabernacle; we have no Shekinah above a material mercy seat; we have now no holy places whatever, and no symbolic worship—

*“Wherever we seek Him He is found,
And every place is hallowed ground!”*

Our service of the spiritual God is *spiritual*. We walk by faith and not by sight; we worship God in the *spirit*, and have no confidence in the flesh. The tribes of Israel, as being in their religious childhood, had manifestations of different kinds. They saw not God, for who shall behold the invisible? But the bright light shone between the wings of the cherubim, the glory of the Lord at times burst forth from the Tabernacle, and on an ever memorable occasion they heard a voice speaking out of the thick darkness from the top of Sinai when the Lord came from Paran with ten thousand of His holy ones! We have not heard the voice, neither have we seen the glory—nor need we wish for either since we have a sure word of testimony, and the abiding of the Holy Spirit; but the Lord treated the tribes in the wilderness as children—their faith and spirituality were so feeble that, like the young Church of Christ in the upper room which needed the rushing wind, and cloven tongues, and miraculous power—they were favored with signs and wonders to confirm their faith. “He taught them to go, taking them by their arms.”

Another part of this spiritual nursing which the Lord condescendingly gave to His people was their instruction by symbols. He did not give to them, as He gives to us, the clear vision of the glorious gospel in the face of Jesus Christ; but as they were not capable of reading the plain sense, and they needed pictures in their books, He gave them many and most instructive symbols. They saw the morning and the evening lamb. How full of instruction must that double offering have been! They ate the Passover; they saw the doors sprinkled with blood; here was a sort of kindergarten school teaching for them. The high priest in his white garments, or in his glorious robes of beauty, with the Urim and Thummim glistening on his breast; the altar, the censor, the candlestick, the table of the showbread, the laver; all these were pictures in the first A B C book for children; the gentle Father was teaching them to walk! There are some childish lovers of the first covenant who would like to get the child's books back again; like big babies they cry for the horn-books of infancy, and would put aside the glory book which God has given to His children to read in the day of the open manifestation of His Holy Spirit! We need not imitate their example; we desire not go back to the rudiments, now that the Lord has revealed Himself in the person of the only-begotten. Yet to Israel type and symbol was the main instruction, and in that respect the Lord taught them to walk or go. Yes, and it was not only instruction by a few chosen symbols, but *everything* was a symbol to them; they were always being instructed and helped. The bread they ate was food from heaven, and the water they drank leaped from the living rock! They were covered from the heat by the cloud; they were lighted at night in their encampment by the fiery pillar—everything about them was fitted for a people that needed something tangible, something to be felt, something to be seen and perceived of the senses—a people in childhood who required to have everything represented to the eye as well as spoken to the ear.

The whole of that 40 years' journey in the wilderness was a long “teaching them to go.” They were not a people able to have formed a well-regulated state; they were no better than a mob of slaves; they were not fit for self-government, and therefore they were led about, trained, taught, educated in the space of 40 years, before they were able to go, as they did at last, when the Lord settled them in Canaan. And note—and here I will not continue the story longer because there are at least 10,000 various ways in which we can illustrate the truth of God—how He treated them as children even in the conquest of Canaan. Before they came up to the country to conquer it, a pestilence had destroyed many of the people; the spies said, “It is a land that eats up the inhabitants thereof.” The Lord had also sent the hornet before them—some terrible and deadly insect which had distressed and driven out the Canaanites, and in addition to these two scourges, the fear of them, and the dread of them had very much weakened their adversaries and prepared the whole land to submit to them! That marvelous passage of the Jordan and that miraculous falling down of the walls of Jericho without their needing to strike a blow—were not these all the means of teaching them to go? Were they not thus gently led on till at last they became men enough

to drive out the Canaanites, and to settle in the land, and sit every man beneath his own vine and fig tree?

We will now leave the seed of Israel, and think of ourselves a while. How very graciously has the meaning of our text been fulfilled in us; the Lord has treated us as a nurse treats a little child.

To begin with, *the first step the child takes*—its first introduction to the art of locomotion *is caused by the nurse's holding it up*. Do we not remember the first uplifting that the Lord gave to some of us? We were groveling in the dust, and would have been content to be there still, but under a gracious word that He sent to us through the ministry, or by some other means, He lifted us up, and we began to feel that there was something better for us than to be always creeping about on the earth, or lying still in indifferent worldliness! The nurse's hand is first put out before the child thinks of walking, and the divine power of the Holy Spirit was first exerted upon us (we being then passive under it for a while) before we felt a desire for better things. We crawled upon the earth like beasts till God taught us to stand erect in uprightness like grace-born men! We owe all to Him who has taught us from our youth!

The nurse, when the child begins to walk, soon *teaches it to know its own weakness*. It has a fall or two, and a few bruises and tears, but the falls are necessary to its learning to walk. We, also, had many slips and falls. Oh, how often did we resolve in the most admirable manner, but our resolutions ended in smoke? How frequently did we make attempts in our own strength? But these were failures, till at last we said, "We must give it up," and we were compelled to lean wholly upon our Lord. We became more active in the right way after we were weaned from our natural self-reliant activities which had been so dear to us; but we were very long in the weaning. Falls into sin are terrible things, and these are not what I speak of here. I mean those broken resolutions, and those aspirations to which we did not attain; those many disappointing tumbles which we encountered when we tried to walk. It is a part of the nurse's art to let the child feel its weakness—and it is a part of our heavenly Father's wisdom to let us know how feeble we are. We are never wise till we discover that we are fools! We are never strong till we confess that we are weak! True enough are the apostle's words, "When I am weak, then am I strong."

The nurse *regulates the child's exertions* and allows it to take a step or two at first, and only a step or two. Do we remember how tottering were our first steps? We limped very sadly; our walking was comparable to the seeing of the man to whom men looked like trees; our state of mind was a mixture of light and darkness. We cried, "Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief." There were only one or two promises in God's word which I could get any hold of when I first came to Him. My soul was stayed a little while on that word, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Only that could I grasp. I have known some who could get consolation from nothing but this sweet word, "Him that comes unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." They could believe only a little; it hardly amounted to *believing*—they reached as far as *hoping* and *trusting*, intermittently mixed up with a world of *doubting* and *fearing*, but they could stir no further! Very delightful to the Christian pastor is it to see a young convert begin to take the first step or two; we have seen them fall down with doubts and fears, but we have been so pleased that they could walk even a little in the way of faith, and believe even a portion of the Word of God! What a mercy it is that the Lord reveals to us His own truth by slow degrees! We ought never to expect our young converts to understand the doctrine of election, and to be able to split hairs in orthodoxy. It is vain to overload them with such a precious truth as union with Christ, or so deep a doctrine as predestination. Do they know Christ as the Savior, and themselves as sinners? Well, then, do not try to make a child run! It will never walk if you do! Do not try to teach the babe gymnastics—first let it totter on and tremble forward a little way. "I have many things to say unto you," said the Savior, "But you cannot hear them now." Now, had certain reputedly wise men been there, they would have said, "Lord, let us hear it all! Make full proof of it all! Bring it all out—we can hear it; only try us." But our Lord knew what was in man, and therefore He, little by little, line upon line, precept upon precept, brought out the truth, and He still does so experimentally with His children. We do not know our own depraved hearts as well at first as we do afterwards; the disease and the remedy have both of them to be more fully revealed to us by-and-by. If we knew at the first all we shall know hereafter, we should be so overwhelmed with the abundance of the revelation that we should not be able to endure it! The Lord, therefore, lets in the light by degrees.

If a person had been long famished, and you were to find him hungry, and faint, and ready to die, your instincts would say, "Put food before him at once, and let him have all he wants." Yet this would be a ready enough way to kill him! If you are wise, you will give him nutriment slowly, as he is able to bear it. If you have been long in the dark, and come into the light at once, your eyes smart, and you cannot bear it; you need to come to it by degrees, and thus is it with the Lord's children. By little and by little He introduces them into the glory of His kingdom, preparing them for its fullness as children are prepared for their manhood. Have you not seen how the nurse will tempt the child to take a little longer walk by holding out a pleasant thing to allure it? And how often has our blessed Lord tempted us to some bolder deed of service, to something that required more faith than we had before by giving us choice signs of His presence, and ravishing our hearts with His love? Some of us know what it is to have seen such sweet results from our little faith that we could not but desire to try what stronger faith would do. God so rewarded the weak faith we had, that we felt we must rely upon Him, and venture still further. Kindly has the Lord conducted us onward in this respect.

The nurse *does not let the child put too much weight upon its little legs at first*, for it might be to its lasting injury. It shall have a little trial of walking—but she will put her hands under its arms, and hold it up that it shall not be tried too long, lest it is strained and injured. So does our heavenly Father try our faith little by little. When we shall have become men in Christ Jesus, we shall be tested by stronger trials, for the Lord loves to put stress upon faith. He sends forth His knights of the cross upon desperate battles, knowing that He intends to glorify Himself in their natural weakness by granting them strength. But to the little babe He sets no such stern tasks; He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, and deals tenderly with those who are but tender. "He carries the lambs in His bosom, and does gently lead those that are with young." Can you not look back, beloved brothers and sisters, to your own experience, and confirm all I have said, only feeling that you could say very much more about it if you could speak out your own heart? The Lord has dealt with us in other respects as children, as, for instance, in *not chiding us for our many mistakes*. If the nurse were to scold the child for not walking as *she* does; if she were to be angry with it because it is not as strong as she is, the poor thing might be long before it came to walk at all! God sometimes does with His people as the artist did with Alexander when he painted him; he did not draw the scar on Alexander's face, but placed his finger over it. Note how the Holy Spirit describes Sarah; there was not much good in what Sarah said on that day when she lied; but she called her husband "lord," and the Holy Spirit lights on *that*, and mentions it to her honor! He has often accepted our poor service, and given us sweetly to feel that it was so, though when we look back upon it we wonder how it could have been accepted at all!

Many of us who preach the gospel had God's blessing on our early preaching. Our knowledge was dreadfully scant, and our ability slender; we wonder how God could have blessed us, but He did. If He were to let us know how badly we do His work even now, we would despair, and do no more; but in His great mercy He lets the light pour on the brighter spots, and lets us see what His Spirit is doing, and so we take courage and go on, and learn to walk after all. With all our trembling, and tumbling, and falling down, we do at length learn to stand upright—and even, by His grace, to run in His ways! Dear brothers and sisters, do you not feel that God has had great patience with you? Do you not wonder that He has endured you? Could you have had so much patience with another, as God has had with you? Impossible! You can hardly run alone yet; can scarcely take a step without slipping or sliding; you need still to be carried in the everlasting arms like babies, and yet you are persuaded that His patience will hold out till there shall be no more need of it! He will bear us as on eagle's wings, that is, with unwearied perseverance and strength of love He will uphold us even to the end. We must remind you, however, before we leave this, that there are some respects in which the figure before us does not come up to the full point. *God has been very gracious to us, beyond what a nurse is to a child*. Let us unfold this fact for a moment or two. The nurse, with the child, has not the disadvantages that God has with us—for we are full of the notion that we *can* walk, and thus there are two battles in our case! The first is to get us out of our bad walking, and the next is to teach us to walk rightly. It is sometimes more difficult to instruct a man who has been educated wrongly than it would have been if he knew nothing; he has both to learn and to unlearn! So with us—we have a notion that we can do so much until the Lord shows us without Him we

can do nothing! We are very strong in our own opinion; we are blown up with pride and self-sufficiency, and that has to be taken from us so that there is a double task for infinite mercy to perform; not merely to plant a tree, but to cut down the old tree and root it up; to get rid of our former way of walking, and then to teach us to walk in the Spirit, and not in the fancied energy of the flesh.

Moreover, you never found a babe anxious to use stilts. But every one of us, when God's Spirit has begun to teach us to walk, seeks to use crutches. "Cursed is he that trusts in man"; and how many of us have deserved that curse, for trusting in man is very, very common. Resting on an arm of flesh seems to be the hereditary disease of God's people! They fly first to this, and then to that, but forget their true and only resting place. The simple walk of faith, trusting and leaning alone upon the Invisible, how difficult it is to bring ourselves to it! We would have some favorite child to lean upon, or husband, or wife, or friend; our abilities, or something or other that we can see and handle shall be the golden calf which we set up and say, "These are your gods, O Israel!" Here is a great difficulty, then, to wean us from crutches which are promoters of spiritual lameness.

I have never met with a child that had any fear about the nurse's power to hold it up. She puts her arms about it, and it trusts itself with her, leaning wholly upon her. But we appear to be afraid of leaning hard upon God; we cannot leave ourselves with Him; we don't throw ourselves right back on the divine bosom; yet there is no true rest to ourselves till we do. As long as we are trying to support ourselves in some measure or degree, we have not yet come to the rest of faith. I have known people who went in the sea to learn to swim, but they never dare take their feet off the bottom, and I do not see how they can swim while they also endeavor to stand on their feet! Standing and swimming cannot be managed at the same time! So there are souls that would gladly trust themselves to the goodness of God, but they cannot be content without an earthly prop; they cannot quite cast themselves upon God and trust in the stream of His abundant faithfulness. This, then, is another difficulty which is not with the nurse, but which is with our God in reference to us. One more remark let us make, and that is that we are, many of us, most unwilling to *try* to walk. Though we are believers, after a fashion, it may be said of us at this day as of those in the Savior's time—"If the Son of man comes, shall He find faith on the earth?" Why, entire portions of the Christian Church are afraid to trust God with the maintenance of their ministers, and the support of their worship! They enter into an adulterous alliance with the State, sooner than trust in God, and rely upon the faithfulness of His people. And as it is with large masses of the people, so is it with separate Christians. They cannot walk by faith; they must have some way or other of clinging to the flesh. Oh, for grace to be willing to believe in God! Oh, for power to cut the moorings, and have done with the signs, and the evidences, and the marks, and come to look upon Christ and His finished work—upon the covenant, and upon the faithful God, who breaks not His promise, and cannot turn away from His decree! May He who teaches us to profit make us to walk in His ways; our prayer is like that of quaint old Quarles—

*"Great ALL IN ALL, that is my rest, my home.
My way is tedious, and my steps are slow—
Reach forth Your helping hand—or bid me come.
I am Your child, O teach Your child to go—
Conjoin Your sweet commands to my desire,
And I will venture, though I fall or tire."*

Now, why is it that mothers take so many pains in teaching their children to walk? I suppose the reason is because they are their own offspring. And the reason why the Lord has been so patient with us, and will be so, is because we are His children; still His children; still, His children! Ah there is wondrous power in that—still His children! I was sitting at table once, and I heard a mother bragging about her son. She said a very great deal about him. And someone sitting near me said, "I wish that good woman would be quiet." I said, "What's the matter? May she not speak of her son?" "Why," he said, "he's in jail; he was as bad a fellow as ever lived, and yet she always sees something wonderful in him." So I ventured, some little time after, when I had gained her acquaintance, to say something about this son. And I remember her remark—"If there is nobody else to speak up for him, his mother always will." Just so; she loved him so that if she could not be altogether blind to his faults, yet she would also see all that was hopeful in him. Our blessed God does not bring into the foreground what we are, as much as

what He means to make us. “Their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more forever.” He puts our blackness away, and He sees us as we shall be when we shall bear the Image of the heavenly, and shall be like our Lord. For Christ’s sake, beholding our shield, and looking upon the face of His anointed, He loves us, and goes on to instruct us! It seems at times as if there were a conflict in the divine heart, and He felt He must surely give us up, but then His love rushes to the rescue, and it comes to this—“How shall I make you as Admah? How shall I set you as Zeboim? My heart is turned within Me, My repentings are kindled together.” He returns to us with such a word as this—“I have betrothed you unto Me in righteousness, and in mercy, and in judgment.” He declares that He hates putting away—“Turn, O backsliding children, says the Lord, for I am married unto you.”

We are His own children! Oh, I have found it such a blessed thing, in my own experience, to plead before God that I am His child! When I was racked some months ago with pain to an extreme degree, so that I could no longer bear it without crying out, I asked all to go from the room and leave me alone. And then I had nothing I could say to God but this, “You are my Father, and I am Your child; and You, as a Father, are tender and full of mercy. I could not bear to see my child suffer as You make me suffer; and if I saw him tormented as I am now, I would do what I could to help him, and put my arms under him to sustain him. Will You hide Your face from *me*, my Father? Will You still lay on a heavy hand, and not give me a smile from Your countenance?” I held the Lord to that; I talked to Him as Luther would have done, and pleaded His Fatherhood in right down earnest. “Like as a father pities his children, even so the Lord pities them who fear Him.” If He is a Father, let Him show Himself a Father—so I pleaded. And I ventured to say, when I was quiet, and they came back who watched me—“I shall never have such pain again from this moment, for God has heard my prayer.” I bless God that ease came, and the racking pain never returned; faith mastered the pain by laying hold upon God in His own revealed character—that character in which in our dark hour we are best able to appreciate Him. I think that is why that prayer, “Our Father which are in heaven,” is given to us, because when we are lowest, we can still say, “Our Father.” And when it is very dark, and we are very weak, our child-like appeal can go up, “Father, help me! Father rescue me!” He teaches us still to go, taking us by the arms, because He is still our parent.

If anyone fears God may leave him, let him inquire whether a mother can forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb, for even if it is so, God will not forget His people! He has engraved you upon the palms of His hands; there is a relationship between you and Him so familiar that it never can be forgotten—so firm that it can never be dissolved. Be of good confidence! He will teach you to go till you shall run without weariness, and walk without fainting. I would that all here had committed themselves to this good Father’s hand. I pray that they may do so. The Holy Spirit grant it, for whoever believes in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—HOSEA 11.

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